Genesis 49:8–12

The Oracle Concerning Yehuda

Critical Text and Translation

MEBAQQER מבקר

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XMR: 43F3Cw8pPvY4RbebuZrVHTSZkt2zpxukK66LAeV1Km1d9vHipZzPHQkfLzy2EJEGvejhDdLPJw8dCRhngmqP36nV9wZGqxA

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הֵאָסְפוּ וְאַגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים

Gather yourselves, so that I may inform YOU of what YOU will encounter in the days to come.

— Genesis 49:1

Critical Text and Translation

Each line of the critical text of Genesis 49:8–12 is displayed in black paleo-Hebrew script, reflecting archaic orthography, accompanied by gray letters in the paleo-Hebrew script that represent later orthographic conventions. Additionally, each line is presented again in the more recent Aramaic script following the later orthography and the vocalization of Tiberian Hebrew.

8aα	Yehuda —	𐤉𐤄𐤅𐤃𐤄 יְהוּדָה	8aα
8aβ	it is you your brothers shall praise;	𐤀𐤀𐤕𐤄 𐤉𐤃𐤅𐤃𐤉𐤊 𐤀𐤇𐤉𐤊 אַתָּה יוֹדוּךָ אַחֶיךָ	8aβ
8bα	your hand being on the nape of your enemies,	𐤉𐤃𐤉𐤊 𐤁𐤏𐤅𐤐 𐤀𐤅𐤉𐤁𐤉𐤊 יָדְךָ בְּעֹרֶף אֹיְבֶיךָ	8bα
8bβ	the sons of your father shall prostrate to you.	𐤉𐤔𐤕𐤇𐤅𐤅 𐤋𐤊 𐤁𐤍𐤉 𐤀𐤁𐤉𐤊 יִשְׁתַּחֲווּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אָבִיךָ׃	8bβ
9aα	Being the whelp of a lion, O Yehuda,	𐤉𐤄𐤅𐤃𐤄 𐤉𐤓𐤉 𐤂𐤅𐤓 גּוּר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה	9aα
9aβ	from becoming prey, my son, you have arisen.	𐤉𐤋𐤏𐤕 𐤁𐤍𐤉 𐤏𐤋𐤉𐤕 מִטֶּרֶף בְּנִי עָלִיתָ	9aβ
9bα	He is crouched, lying in wait like a lion;	𐤉𐤓𐤂𐤏 𐤊𐤀𐤓𐤉 𐤉𐤓𐤁𐤏 כָּרַע רָבַץ כְּאַרְיֵה	9bα
9bβ	like a lioness, who would rouse him?	𐤉𐤉𐤓𐤂𐤏𐤅 𐤌𐤉 𐤉𐤒𐤉𐤌𐤍𐤅׃ וּכְלָבִיא מִי יְקִימֶנּוּ׃	9bβ
10aα	No tribe shall depart from Yehuda,	𐤉𐤄𐤅𐤃𐤄 𐤔𐤁𐤈 𐤌𐤉𐤄𐤅𐤃𐤄 לֹא־יָסוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיהוּדָה	10aα
10aβ	no commander from among his companies;	𐤉𐤁𐤉𐤍 𐤁𐤂𐤋𐤉𐤅 𐤌𐤇𐤅𐤒𐤒 וּמְחֹקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו	10aβ
10bα	as long as he comes to Shilo,	𐤉𐤁𐤀 𐤔𐤉𐤋𐤄 עַד כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁלֹה	10bα
10bβ	to him compatriots shall gather.	𐤉𐤋𐤅 𐤉𐤒𐤄𐤕𐤅 𐤏𐤌𐤉׃ וְלוֹ יִקְּהַת עַמִּים׃	10bβ
11aα	His city bound to the grapevine,	𐤉𐤒𐤄𐤅 𐤂𐤅𐤓𐤉 𐤋𐤂𐤐𐤍 𐤏𐤉𐤓𐤄 אֲסוּרִי לַגֶּפֶן עִירֹה	11aα
11aβ	its steadfast sons to its choice vine;	𐤉𐤂𐤕𐤇𐤉𐤊 𐤁𐤍𐤉 𐤀𐤉𐤕𐤍𐤅 וּלְשֹׂרֵקָה בְּנֵי אֵיתָנוֹ	11aβ
11bα	he has fulled his clothing with wine,	𐤉𐤅𐤍 𐤂𐤁𐤔 𐤋𐤁𐤔𐤅 כִּבֵּס בַּיַּיִן לְבֻשׁוֹ	11bα
11bβ	his vesture with the blood of grapes;	𐤉𐤃𐤌 𐤏𐤍𐤁𐤉𐤌 𐤎𐤅𐤕𐤄׃ וּבְדַם־עֲנָבִים סוּתֹה׃	11bβ
12aα	being one whose eyes are inflamed from wine,	𐤉𐤉𐤍𐤉𐤌 𐤌𐤉𐤍 חַכְלִילִי עֵינַיִם מִיָּיִן	12aα
12aβ	and one whose teeth are white from fat!	𐤉𐤇𐤋𐤁 𐤔𐤍𐤉𐤌 𐤌𐤇𐤋𐤁׃ ס וּלְבֶן־שִׁנַּיִם מֵחָלָב׃ ס	12aβ

Notes on the Text

The readings adopted for the critical text which depart from the Tiberian Masoretic Text (M) are presented below, accompanied by translations in bold italics. Additionally, notes on the interlineal relationships of lines which depart significantly from the Tiberian Masoretic Text are included to illustrate how the text and translation of these lines in the critical text accord with the syntax of Classical Hebrew poetry.[1]

9bα. רֹבֵץ (*rōbēṣ*) ***lying in wait*** SP (𐤓𐤁𐤁𐤑, *rēbåṣ*) (vocal: part)

רָבַץ (*rābaṣ*) *he has lain in wait* M (רָבָֽץ) (vocal: perf)

9bβ. Concerning the translation of the prepositional phrase מִטֶּרֶף (*miṭṭerep*) in line 9bβ as "*from becoming* prey," compare the definition "**from (being)**" for מִן (*min*) in *DCH* s.v. מִן 6b.

10aβ. דְּגָלָיו (*dəgālāyw*) ***his companies*** SP (𐤃𐤂𐤂𐤋𐤏, *dēgåla*)

Cf. *4QCommentary on Genesis A* (4Q252) v 3: פי ישראל המה הדגלים [ואל] ("[and the thou]sands of Yisra'el are the '*companies*' [*dəgālîm*]")

רַגְלָיו (*raglāyw*) *his feet* M (רַגְלָֽיו) G (τῶν μηρῶν αὐτοῦ) (graph ד → ר)

For the translation of the noun דֶּגֶל (*degel*) as "company," see the definition "**battalion**, **company** of troops" in *DCH* s.v. דֶּגֶל 2.

10aα–β. The interlineal relationship of lines 10aα–β evidences a reformulative structure, where the appositive line 10aβ refocuses the general statement on the commitment of the other tribes to Yehuda established in line 10aα to a military context:

10aα		*lōʾ-yāsûr* there shall not depart (NegP +) VP +	*šēbeṭ* a tribe NP +	*mîhûdâ* from Yehuda PP	**Non-apposition** (new image)
10aβ	*û-* and (CP+)	*lōʾ-yāsûr* there shall not depart (NegP +) VP +	*məḥōqēq* a commander NP +	*mibbên dĕgālāyw* from among his companies PP	**Apposition** (clausal) Reformulation of 10aα

For the translation of the noun שֵׁבֶט (*šēbeṭ*) as "tribe," see the definition "**tribe**" in *DCH* s.v. שֵׁבֶט 1. For the translation of the substantive participle מְחֹקֵק (*məḥōqēq*) as "commander," see the definition "**commander**" in *DCH* s.v. חקק **Po** 2.

10bα. שִׁלֹה (*šilōh*) ***Shilo*** SP (𐤔𐤉𐤋𐤀, *šīlå*)

שֶׁלֹּה (*šellōh*) *one who belongs to him*? */ one to whom it belongs*? */ what belongs to him*? G (τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτω) G^{var} (ᾧ ἀπόκειται) (vocal)

שילה (*šylh*) *Shilo* M^{K} (שילה) (plene)

שִׁילוֹ (*šîlô*) *Shilo* M^{Q} (שִׁילֹו) (normalized plene)

שָׁלוּחַ (*šālûaḥ*) *one sent* V (*qui mittendus est*) (graph ה → ח)

10bβ. יִקְּהַתּוּ (*yiqqāhăṭû*) ***they shall gather*** SP (𐤉𐤀𐤒𐤄𐤈𐤅, *yiqqåṭu*) (verb)

Cf. Stefan Schorch, "Lexicon of Samaritan Hebrew According to the Samaritan Pentateuch Tradition," in *Biblical Lexicology: Hebrew and Greek: Semantics – Exegesis – Translation*, eds. Eberhard Bons, Jan Joosten and Regine Hunziker-Rodewald (BZAW 443; Berlin: De Groyter, 2015), 354–355.

[1] On the framework of binary opposition (apposition : non-apposition) assumed here as a replacement to the Lowthian framework of parallelism, see Robert D. Holmstedt, "Hebrew Poetry and the Appositive Style: Parallelism, *Requiescat in pace*," *VT* 69 (2019): 617–648.

יִקְהַת (*yiqəhat*) *the gathering of* M (יִקְוַת) α′ (σύστημα) (noun)

Cf. *4QCommentary on Genesis A* (4Q252) v 5–7: … כי |הוא אשר אמר ולו יקהת עמים הוא כנסת אנשי |היהוד יקהת עמים, (“Because [it is he of whom it is said, ‘and to him belongs the gathering of people]s’ (Gen 49:10bβ). ‘The gathering of peoples’ is the assembly of the men of [the Yahad …”).

תִּקְוַת* (*tiqwat*) *the expectation of* G (προσδοκία)

10bα–β. The interlineal relationship of lines 10bα–β establishes a conditional structure relative to the preceding lines 10aα–β, with 10bα presenting the protasis and 10bβ serving as the corresponding apodosis:

10bα	*ʿad kî*		*yābōʾ*	*šilōh*	**Non-apposition**
	as long as		he comes	to Shilo	(concomitant circumstance)
	(CP+)		VP +	NP (PrNP)	Protasis to 10bβ
10bβ	*wə-*	*lô*	*yiqqāhătû*	*ʿammîm*	**Non-apposition**
	then	to him	they$_1$ shall gather	compatriots$_1$	(enjambment)
	(CP+)	PP +	VP +	NP	Apodosis to 10bα

For the translation of עַד כִּי (*ʿad kî*) as “as long as,” compare the use of its cognate 𐤏𐤃𐤊 (*ʿdky*) with this meaning in *ʿ**dky** tmṭr ʾ-smy dm w-l-’rḍ śʿr* (“***so long as*** the sky produces rain or the earth herbage”) (Qaryat al-Fāw l. 8–10; A.F.L. Beeston, “Nemara and Faw,” *BSOAS* 42/1 (1979): 1–2) as well as Gen 49:10 in the 1917 translation by JPS: “*as long as* men come to Shiloh.” For the translation of the noun עַם (*ʿam*) as “compatriot,” see the definiton “**people**, i.e. **compatriots**” in *DCH* s.v. עַם 3.

11aα. אֲסוּרִי (*ʾăsûrî*) ***bound*** SP (𐡀𐡎𐡅𐡓𐡉, *ʾsūrī*) (qal pass)

אֹסְרִי (*ʾōsərî*) *binding* M (אֹסְרֶי) G (δεσμεύων) (qal)

- עִירֹה (*ʿîrōh*) ***his city*** M^{K} (עירה) (= עִיר (*ʿêr*, “city”))

  Cf. T^{O} (וְסַחַר יִשְׂרָאֵל לְקִרְתֵּיהּ, “Yisra’el shall surround *his city*”); *Gen. Rab.* 98:9: אֹסְרִי לַגֶּפֶן עִירֹה, הָעִיר אֹסְרִי לַגֶּפֶן עירה, מֵאוֹסְרִי לַגֶּפֶן עִירֹה, אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּי בָהּ (“‘Binding *ʿyrh* to the grapevine’ (Gen 49:11aα) — From ‘binding *his city* [*ʿîrōh*] to the grapevine,’ comes ‘*the city* [*hāʿîr*] that I have chosen’ (1 Kgs 11:32)”)

  עִירֹה (*ʿyrh*) *his donkey / jack* M^{K} (עירה) G (τὸν πῶλον αὐτοῦ) (= עַיִר (*ʿayir*, “donkey”) / ^{II}עִיר$^{?}$ (*ʿîr*, “jack”)) (interp)

  עַיִר (*ʿa**yi**r*, “donkey”) → עִירוֹ (*ʿ**ê**rōh*, “his donkey”) (cf. בַּיִת (*ba**yi**t*, “house”) → בֵּיתוֹ (*b**ê**tô*, “his house”) (Gen 12:17), but שַׁיִת (*ša**yi**t*) → שִׁיתוֹ (*š**ī**tōh*) (Isa 10:17)).

  עִירוֹ (*ʿîrô*) *his city / donkey / jack* M^{Q} (עִירֹו) SP (𐡏𐡉𐡓𐡅, *īru*) (mod)

11aβ. וּלְשֹׂרֵקָה (*ûlaśōrēqōh*) ***and to its choice vine***

Cf. Frank Moore Cross Jr. and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry,* eds. Astrid Beck and David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans and Livonia, MI: Dove Booksellers, 1997), 57–58.

וְלַשֹּׂרֵקָה (*wəlaśśōrēqâ*) *and to the long branch*$^{?}$ M (וְלַשֹּׂרֶקָה) (vocal)

Cf. Rashi on Genesis 49:11.

וּלְשֵׁרִיקָה$^{?}$ (*ûlašerêqâ*) *and to what is empty*$^{?}$ SP (𐡅𐡋𐡔𐡓𐡉𐡒𐡄, *walšērīqa*) ST^{J} (ולריקה)

Cf. Moshe Florentin and Abraham Tal, *The Samaritan Pentateuch: An English Translation with a Parallel Annotated Hebrew Text*, (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024), 944.

ולשרקה (*?*) *and to the tendril*$^{?}$ G (καὶ τῇ ἕλικι)

For the translation of the noun שֹׂרֵק (*śōrēq*) as “choice vine,” see the definition “**choice vines**” in *DCH* s.v. ^{I}שֹׂרֵק (Contrast the definition “a valued, bright-red species of grape” in *HALOT* s.v. ^{II}שֹׂרֵק 1).

- בְּנֵי אֵיתָנוֹ (*bənê ʾêtānô*) ***its steadfast sons*** ST^{J} (ברי עמוקה = 𐤁𐤍𐤉 𐤀𐤉𐤕𐤍𐤅 (*bånі ītånu*)).

  Cf. *Gen. Rab.* 98:9: וְלַשֹּׁרֵקָה בני אתנו. בָּנִים הָאֵיתָנִים רְאוּיִים לַעֲמֹד מִמֶּנּוּ (“‘And to the long branch[ʾ] *bny ʾtnw*’ (Gen 49:11aβ) — *enduring sons* [*bānîm hāʾêtānîm*] fittingly continue from him”).

  בְּנִי אֵיתָנוֹ (*bənî ʾêtānô*) *its steadfast son* SP (𐤁𐤍𐤉 𐤀𐤉𐤕𐤍𐤅, *bēni ītånu*)

  Cf. Ze’ev Ben-Ḥayyim, *A Grammar of Samaritan Hebrew: Based on the Recitation of the Law in Comparison with the Tiberian and Other Jewish Traditions*, rev. English ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000), 281–282n49.

  בְּנִי אֲתֹנוֹ (*bənî ʾătōnô*) *the son of his jennet* M (בְּנֵי אֲתֹנֹו) G (τὸν πῶλον τῆς ὄνου αὐτοῦ)

For the translation of the adjective אֵיתָן (*ʾêtān*) as “steadfast,” see the definition “steadfast” in *Klein* s.v. אֵיתָן.

11aα–β. The interlineal relationship of lines 11aα–β evidences a reformulative structure, where the appositive line 11aβ refocuses the connection of the Yehudite city to “the grapevine” established in line 11aα to the sons of the city who are connected more specifically to the “choice vine”:

11aα		*ʾăsûrî*	*laggepen*	*ʿîrōh*	**Non-apposition** (new image)
		bound	to the grapevine	his city	
		VP +	PP +	NP	
11aβ	*wə-*	*ʾăsûrî*	*ləśōrēqōh*	*bənê ʾêtānô*	**Apposition** (clausal) Reformulation of 11aα
	and	bound	to its choice vine	its steadfast sons	
	(CP+)	VP +	PP +	NP	

12aβ. מֵחֶלֶב (*mēḥēleb*) ***from fat*** SP (𐤌𐤉𐤉𐤑𐤋𐤁, *miyyēləb*)

מֵחָלָב (*mēḥālāb*) *than milk* M (מֵחָלָב׃) G (ἢ γάλα) (vocal)

12aα–β. Lines 12aα–β give metaphorical descriptions of the features of Yehuda, with the non-appositional line 12aα relating to Yehuda’s eyes and the additive non-appositional line 12aβ relating to Yehuda’s teeth:

12aα		*ḥaklîlî ʿênayim*	*miyyāyin*	**Non-apposition** (new image)
		one inflamed of eyes	from wine	
		AdjP+	PP	
12aβ	*û-*	*ləben-šinnayim*	*mēḥēleb*	**Additive Non-apposition**
	and	one white of teeth	from fat	
	(CP+)	AdjP+	PP	

For the translation of the *hapax* adjective חַכְלִיל (*ḥaklîl*) as “inflamed,” compare the related *hapax* noun חַכְלִלוּת (*ḥaklilût*, “inflammation”) in Pro 23:29 used to describe a type of injury (cf. Pro 23:35):[2]

29cα	Who has wounds for no reason?	לְמִי פְּצָעִים חִנָּם	**29cα**
29cβ	Who has inflammation of eyes?	לְמִי חַכְלִלוּת עֵינָיִם׃	**29cβ**

[2] Compare the translations *cui suffusio oculorum* V (“To whom is inflammation of eyes?”) and למן סכנה אלעיון (= لمن سخنة العيون) *Tafsīr* (“To whom is inflammation of the eyes?”). See also the midrash on this verse in *Lev. Rab.* 12:1: סברוניה דהוא גנב הוו מחיין ליה ולא ארגיש פדעיניה ולא ידע משמשם בעינוי והוא לא חמי כלום קרי עליה לְמִי פְצָעִים חִנָּם. לְמִי פידעין דמגן. לְמִי הכלילות עינים. לְמִי שומשמין דעיינין. (“Thinking that he was a thief, they struck him, but he did not feel his injuries, and he did not know *he had become inflammed* in his eyes—he had not seen anything! It is written about him, *ləmî pəṣāʿîm ḥinnām* (Pro 23:29cα), ‘Who has injuries for no reason?’ *ləmî ḥaklilût ʿênāyim* (Pro 23:29cβ), ‘Who has *inflammation of* eyes?’”) (cf. Jastrow s.v. שְׁמִשְׁמִין; s.v. שְׁמִשָּׁא; s.v. סָמְקָן; s.v. סַמְקָא). Concerning the interpretation of משמשם בעינוי (“he had become inflammed in his eyes”) as an asyndetic dependent clause, compare Hugo Odeberg, *The Aramaic Portions of Bereshit Rabba with Grammar of Galilaean Aramaic*, vol. 2 (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1939), §513.

Exposition

The oracle of Genesis 49:8–12 presents the tribe of Yehuda as a tribe of fierce warriors which is praised by the tribes of Yisra'el for its ferocity in battle and its ability to subjugate its enemies. These two traits form the basis for its military leadership among the tribes, with a pledge of commitment given in the text that the tribes of Yisra'el will not fail to rally to Yehuda whenever they are called to muster at Shilo:

• **Verse 8:** ***Yehuda — it is you your brothers shall praise*** (8aα–β) — You will be praised (*ydh*) among your brothers in accordance with the signification of your name (*yəhûdâ*). ***Your hand being on the nape of your enemies*** (8bα) — Because you have subjugated your enemies. ***The sons of your father shall prostrate to you*** (8bβ) — Your brothers will show you deference with acts of prostration.

• **Verse 9:** ***Being the whelp of a lion, O Yehuda*** (9aα) — Since you are the progeny of a predator. ***From becoming prey, my son, you have arisen*** (9aβ) — You yourself have become a predator, thereby avoiding predation by others. ***He is crouched, lying in wait like a lion*** (9bα) — The tribe of Yehuda is powerfully poised, ready to strike at any moment. ***Like a lioness, who would rouse him?*** (9bβ) — Who in their right mind would provoke the tribe of Yehuda which takes the offensive?

• **Verse 10:** ***No tribe shall depart from Yehuda*** (10aα) — None of the tribes of Yisra'el will turn away from Yehuda. ***No commander from among his companies*** (10aβ) — None of the commanders who represent the tribal armies of Yisra'el will fail to join their armies to the ranks of Yehuda. ***As long as he comes to Shilo*** (10bα) — For as long as Yehuda appears in Shilo to muster the tribes. ***To him compatriots shall gather*** (10bβ) — Yehuda's compatriots from the tribes of Yisra'el will rally to it for battle when it calls.

• **Verse 11:** ***His city bound to the grapevine*** (11aα) — With Yehuda's city of Ḥevron allied with the tribal confederation of Yisra'el. ***Its steadfast sons to its choice vine*** (11aβ) — With the fighting men of Ḥevron united with the elite fighting men of Yisra'el. ***He has fulled his clothing with wine*** (11bα) — Yehuda's clothes have become stained with the color of wine. ***His vesture with the blood of grapes*** (11bβ) — Yehuda's vesture has become soaked with the blood of battle.

• **Verse 12:** ***Being one whose eyes are inflamed from wine*** (12aα) — Yehuda's eyes are filled with bloodlust from the blood it has seen in battle. ***And one whose teeth are white from fat!*** (12aβ) — Yehuda stands victorious, having devoured its enemies by the mouth of the sword.

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